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Conservation Is The Solution To Cutting Costs

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What do the astounding rise in energy prices mean to Connecticut and to you, the reader? What can we do about it, if anything? These questions have been asked frequently this year as we watched the price of oil and gas rise over the summer months and then surge after the hurricanes hit the southeast United States. Price increases have never been higher and are likely to average more than 40 percent for home heating compared to last year. Some of the rational explanations for rising costs involve the laws of supply and demand, the natural disasters that closed oil refineries and the fact that Connecticut is at the "end of the pipeline." But none of this lessens the harsh impact on families and businesses. If we have a sustained cold winter season, Connecticut citizens could face serious situations, some involving public health and safety issues. If there are disruptions in the electric supply, we could face a dire crisis.

Energy costs are now taking a significant portion out of everyone's budget. For some people, these cost increases might mean deferring some purchases, but for others it can mean not buying groceries or needed medicine. To address this concern, the governor, legislators and other state officials are seeking more state and federal funds for those who cannot afford to heat their homes. Operation Fuel is another community program that deserves our increased support. It provides funds to those who are at risk, but who are not eligible under the income guidelines for the federal program. The state's electric utilities match ratepayer donations to Operation Fuel up to a certain level to provide additional heating funds. For more information, visit www.operationfuel.org. Call the info line at 211 if you need help with your heating bill this year.

Things You Can Do

On a more positive note, there are things you can do to make sure you are not throwing your dollars out drafty doors and windows or through inefficient lighting or high temperature settings. There is an abundance of information on energy efficiency that can save you money without sacrificing your comfort. At the end of this article I've listed some sites that we think are informative and helpful. Consider buying energy efficient products (which may be eligible for tax credits) such as efficient light bulbs, programmable thermostats, weather-stripping and Energy Star endorsed appliances. Also, to get your attention, several state-sponsored public awareness campaigns have been running on TV, radio and in print on the importance of energy efficiency to help you manage your energy costs by making sustainable (i.e. providing long-term benefits) energy efficiency improvements.

State Leading the Way

At the state level, all state facilities are looking at ways to reduce energy costs by 10 percent this coming year. This call to action by Gov. M. Jodi Rell is reminiscent of similar calls for state energy use reduction by Govs. Ella Grasso in 1975 and William O'Neill in 1990 and is an important step in leading by example. The state's energy bill is about \$80 million and a 10 percent goal could put \$8 million back into the general fund for other state purposes. Without question, the wise use of energy is good for business and residential bottom lines and can help put more dollars into Connecticut's general economy.

So what is the prognosis? Will energy prices come down? It's possible some leveling off may occur such

as when all of the oil refineries are back in business. However global demand is not going to decrease nor will our appetites for more high- tech electronic equipment that require additional energy to run.

Consumers have choices on how much we add to the demand for energy. This article discusses mostly the near-term situation. In coming months, as the Connecticut DPUC puts the state's new energy independence programs into place, there will be more information and incentives available to consider with the explicit goal of reducing energy costs. These are serious questions for each of us. How we answer will be our legacy on our care and concern for the world we live in, for the environment and for the future generations that will carry on long after we are gone.

Web sites on Connecticut energy efficiency tips and programs: www.ctsavesenergy.org; www.wattsnewct.com; or www.ct-energyinfo.com; or call 1-877 Wise-Use.

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